Interview with Everett E. Bierman

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR EVERETT E. BIERMAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Bierman.]

Q: Today is July 23rd, 1991. This is an interview with Ambassador Everett E. Bierman on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give me a little about your early background, where you were born, educated?

BIERMAN: I'm a native of what I like to call the heartland of America, the mid-west.

Q: Where in the mid-west?

BIERMAN: Born and reared in Nebraska. My early background was in journalism.

Q: Where did you go to school?

BIERMAN: I'm a graduate of Purdue University and later I have a master's degree in communications from American University in Washington. But my early career was in communications, in journalism as a public information officer, and from there I progressed into corporate public relations, and government relations, with a Fortune 500 company.

Q: What company was that?

BIERMAN: Central ___ Company which is a food and agricultural Agribusiness.

Q: That must be a major exporter, isn't it?

BIERMAN: A major exporter. A company that operates around the world, and incidentally is now owned by an Italian conglomerate which is an indication of how things change. My background was in agriculture in the private sector, including journalism, communications. And from there I moved from the private sector to Capitol Hill where a Congressman I knew indicated that he had an opening on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Q: Which Congressman was this?

BIERMAN: The late Congressman E. Ross Adair of Indiana, who was later ambassador to Ethiopia. A very fine gentleman, and a very able legislator who served 20 years in the House.

Q: Just for the record, when did you start with the Foreign Affairs Committee?

BIERMAN: I started there on May 1, 1967, as a professional staff member, and I became also the staff director for the minority in the House of the Republican party. I was the first minority staff employee ever of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Q: Just to explain a little, how does one get on the staff, and what were your responsibilities?

BIERMAN: Well, there are as many ways to get on the staff as there are people, I think. Certainly the individual member of Congress has to feel you have some professional qualities that would be useful. I, and many others, had a background in communications and when I pointed out that at that point I wasn't a professional in foreign policy, the answer was, “You will be all too soon.” I didn't quite believe him, so I talked to a friend

of mine who was then Dean Emeritus of the School of Foreign Service at American University, and his answer was, “Bierman, work hard for a year and you'll learn more than we can teach you in our program.” I said, “Thank you,” because I had already gone through one program getting a graduate degree there, going at night, so I was pleased I didn't have to add that on to an already busy schedule. Of course, in my case, as the minority staff director, I was a Republican because I served the Republican members. There's a majority staff also, and then there's now subcommittee staffs. So you have a very complex staff system on Capitol Hill which has grown tremendously over the years, but that's another subject.

Q: Actually I'd like to get to that in the foreign affairs field later on. Prior to '67 then there wasn't a permanent staff, or was it all from one party?

BIERMAN: There was a small permanent staff, all of whom reported directly to the chairman. There was no one serving exclusively minority members.

Q: In the first place, who were the prime figures at least beginning when you were there, from Congress on the House Foreign Affairs Committee?

BIERMAN: The chairman at that time was Dr. Thomas Morgan of Pennsylvania. The ranking Republican was E. Ross Adair from Indiana, which meant as the ranking member he was my principal boss. Most of the members have changed since that date. There are three members left; the present chairman, Dante Fascell of Florida; Lee Hamilton of Indiana—both Democrats; and Bill Broomfield of Michigan—Republican, who was my boss for the last 13 or 14 years prior to my going out as an ambassador. During the intervening years from '67 to '86 when I took on my assignment in Papua New Guinea, there had been a great deal of transition, a lot of change due the retirements, some defeats, in some cases members leaving the House to run for the Senate. But there had been a great deal of change, not only in people, but I would say, in their approach to the way people looked at foreign policy.

Q: Could you go into that, please, maybe with some examples?

BIERMAN: Well, how best to address it. Initially, in the early years that I was with the committee, there was still, in my opinion, a great deal of the feeling of bipartisanship. In the ___ of Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Republican of Michigan, who had worked closely with the Democratic President, Harry Truman, in the days following World War II, in taking some of the difficult, but courageous steps that were needed toward the rebuilding of Europe, and efforts to secure the peace following World War II. There's been a great change on the Hill since those days, not just in foreign policy, but foreign policy has been a part of it. Part of it reflects Vietnam, and Watergate. Part of it reflects the fact that out of those two circumstances many members of the Congressional institution felt it was important to have their own sources of information. That translated into more staff. Many members simply felt that as a coequal branch of the government, and the Congress certainly sees itself as a coequal branch with the executive branch, that it ought to be in on the take-off as well as the landing on certain policy decisions. And then in the mid-"70s you had a reorganization of the Congress in which the power of the famous committee chairman, many of whom were men of great power, that power was diluted as more power was spread around to the younger subcommittee chairmen. This was a period in which more young, highly educated, highly articulate, members of Congress coming in, and they were less willing to follow. You hear criticism of lack of leadership. The problem isn't so much, in my opinion, lack of leadership, as it is the shortage of those willing to follow. So there was a big change. When Eisenhower was president, he could call up Sam Rayburn in whose building—a building named after him—I worked for 20 years—he could call in the speaker, Sam Rayburn, he could call in the then majority leader, Lyndon Johnson, discuss a problem; say, “Gentlemen I need your help.” And if they committed it, he could be sure of it. The speaker could deliver in those days. Today, no speaker of the House, no matter how well intentioned, can deliver on many issues.

Q: In the Foreign Affairs Committee, how did this translate? Did you see a change in how the committee operated, or how both the members and the staff operated?

BIERMAN: Yes. There definitely was a change. Part of the reorganization provided that each subcommittee chairman got his own staff. Whereas previously, the time I arrived May 1, 1967, there was a small staff of, I think, 16 or 17 people total, counting clerks, who reported to the chairman. With the advent of the reorganization, each subcommittee chairman got an allotment for staff. Staff means power, staff means independence. The committee chairman continues to be an important person, the leader of the committee, but his power is not as complete as when he controlled all of the staff. In effect, you have in most committees a central staff, reporting to the chairman, and to the chief of staff. You have a group of subcommittee staffs reporting to their respective subcommittee chairman. And you have the minority staff, which happens to be Republican at this time. So its a much more complicated arrangement than it used to be. Is this good or bad? You can find supporters, and you can find critics. But it does mean that you've got more people on the staff who are specialists and experts in certain areas. So that the Congress is less dependent than it used to be upon expertise from the executive branch. And that's the way Congress wants it because it sees itself as a co-equal branch. So it is a very different situation than it used to be.

Q: Particularly in your position, what was your main role?

BIERMAN: I was the head of the minority staff, staff director, chief of staff, whatever you want to call it—they call it the latter now. My job was to coordinate the work of the minority staff in support of the Republican members of the committee, and actually it extended somewhat beyond that because the Republican leadership of the House—I remember President Gerald Ford when he was the Republican leader—they looked to the minority staff in support of their initiatives. Many times when I'd pick up the phone the voice on the other end would be Gerry Ford, saying, “Ev, what did you do in the committee today on so and so?” “What's the status of your conference with the Senate on something else?”

Our job was to support, to provide expertise, to provide backup, to try to look ahead and provide intelligence on where we were going on different issues. And during the periods of a Republican president, which were since '68, since the Nixon presidency, had been all but four years. The Republican administration also looked to us very closely in support of their initiatives. Now that isn't automatic. Republicans are not a clone of one another, nor are Democrats a clone of one another. But we did try to be supportive of Republican administrations.

Q: Were there any issues while you were dealing with this that particularly strike you as being difficult to deal with?

BIERMAN: Yes, there were a number of very politically difficult issues. One was the nuclear freeze issue, you may remember that period, in which there was a major effort to impose a freeze on nuclear testing. And I should point out on all of these issues that, unlike a parliamentary system where the Prime Minister is the leader of his party in parliament and everybody pretty much moves in the direction that he leads, or else leaves the party. In our House of Representatives, and our Senate, Republicans and Democrats cross the aisle frequently on different issues, and have much greater independence. This makes the job of the Republican and Democratic leaders more difficult, but I think its good. But that was a very difficult issue; one that was highly complicated on which people of goodwill and integrity were on both sides of the issues. It wasn't a black or white issue, it was very gray in many respects.

Q: Obviously this was a pretty complicated issue, and very technical, you had a lot of emotion come up. I doubt if anybody on your staff who really was an absolute expert on throw weight__ and nuclear—I mean these are very few and far between.

BIERMAN: Well, these were difficult issues, and in our case we worked very closely with the executive branch which in a Republican administration was opposed to a nuclear freeze. So we had access to technical expertise where we needed it. But it was as much

an emotional and political issue probably as anything else. My role, frankly, in a staff capacity, was to find ways to make the bill which we anticipated would pass, something that the administration could live with. That meant selecting certain amendments, finding key sponsors—Democrat and Republican. I must say we accomplished what we set out to do, and after we had done that, it happened that a vote was held, the bill as amended passed, and everyone declared victory. But you haven't heard much of the nuclear freeze issue since then.

Q: Sometimes these things get up and they cause a tremendous effort, and yet when its done its sort of compromised down, and everybody feels they've gotten a piece of the action and then they can go back to tending to the store.

BIERMAN: I think you've said it very well.

Q: Did you find, in your position there, the Congressional staff on both sides of the Congress, has been in for a lot attention and sometimes criticism about saying that much of what happens in the foreign affairs committees—I get this from the State Department—are driven by personalities from within the staff. I mean every once in while you have an ideologue, or something, Biafra was one of the ones, the Polisario thing between Morocco and Algeria, and some other ones. Did you find any of this, or is this overstated.

BIERMAN: Oh, it may be a little overstated, but there is some of that there. I might say that within staff there are a couple of categories, and I want to be careful how I say this. You've got professional staff in the House and Senate who've been there forever, who are highly professional, who know the issues, who know the technicalities, and are just considered by members to be invaluable. But in the proliferation of staff that has occurred in recent years, there's been a great addition of rather young staff, many of whom are fine professionals, and who, I think, have a great future on the Hill. But there are others who don't see the Hill as a professional end in itself, who see it maybe as a short term stepping stone to something else. And among some of them you do find people with their

own agenda, which is something any member of Congress has to kind of watch out for. My own view as a professional was that, yes, I had my own views of course, but as long as I'm working for a member of Congress, or members of Congress, the members' agenda is my agenda—was my agenda. And that's the way I operated for nearly 20 years, and I had five different ranking minority members in that time, anyone of whom could have said, “Goodbye Bierman.” You have no civil service protection.

Q: How did you find some of these people who were far out to the right, or to the left, with their own agenda? If you can give me some examples, that would be fine.

BIERMAN: There are some that are far out to the right, and far out to the left, but largely they worked for members who are far out to the right, or far out to the left. I would point out that on this nuclear freeze issue, when we came to a vote that night, the only people who opposed voting were those on the far right, and the far left, who would rather go down in glorious defeat, or whatever in behalf of the cause for which they were deeply committed. I respected these people, they're deeply committed. I happen to belong to the pragmatic center where I feel, speaking personally—I'm retired government now so I can be forthcoming—most of the progress is made. It may be two steps forward, and one back, but its in the great center, center left, center right, where most things are accomplished. That's not to diminish many whom are highly intelligent, and committed, on the left or the right. They have ideas which are useful, and many of which are at some point implemented. But as far as staff are concerned, members who are so vulnerable, because of being up for reelection, particularly in the House every two years, it is just absolutely essential to them to have staff whose loyalty they can count on, and who will not be, hopefully, pushing an agenda which may run counter to their own interests. Now, the way I handled it as a professional, if I had a point of view, I would express it, and the member would either accept it, or not. And I learned to read his lips pretty well, and I knew which issues I could push on, and which ones it was simply a waste of time.

Q: Were you, and others who are professionals, sort of following the polls too so that you knew which issues—there might be merit in it, but this isn't going to fly back in the constituencies of the people you have, and let's not waste our energy here, or did you let the members give that input.

BIERMAN: I had a very good personal relationship with Congressman Broomfield. I speak of him because he was my boss for about 13 of those 20 years, and I pretty well knew his thinking, and he and I were basically on the same wave length. If I thought of something that I thought might be of value to him, I'd bring it up, and he might say, “Yes, that's worthwhile going ahead.” In other case, he might say, “Well, that's right, but I don't think I want to push that at this point.” Unless you have that kind of personal relationship, where you can sit down, like you and I are talking, its hard to know sometime the direction they may be leaning. And I knew where the pressure points were, I knew which lobby groups were important factors in his district, and that he had to listen to, and be responsive to. So obviously I didn't push things which I knew were going to draw an automatic no anyway. Most members, including Congressman Broomfield, they're willing to take the flak on issues that they feel deeply about. I can recall an issue involving the Turkish arms embargo.

Q: Oh, yes. This was after the 1974 invasion of Cyprus following a Greek coup.

BIERMAN: The Congressman tried to be helpful to then President Gerry Ford, and then following Gerry, to President Carter. And he took a certain amount of flak from the Greek Americans in his district, but he did what he thought was right at that time. And naturally, I was in there on the staff side helping round up votes, writing amendments, preparing speeches and talking papers, doing all the things that staff are hired to do.

Q: One of the criticisms of the assumption of more authority by Congress has been in the micromanagement of foreign policy, particularly things such aid allocations, and all this,

where the cumulative affect can be detrimental to moving ahead foreign relations. How did you feel about as this developed?

BIERMAN: I have to point out that I served in the executive branch as an ambassador, so I looked at it from both sides. My own personal opinion, is that Congress has gone too far in the direction of micromanagement. There was a point in the late "70s, I believe it was '78-'79, that period, in which the intelligence agency was reporting to, I believe it was, eight committees of Congress, four House and four Senate, and my boss offered an amendment which I had the pleasure of drafting, which reduced that to two, one in the House and one in the Senate. Congress does micromanage, and I must say on occasion, some of the micromanagement is salutary. Congress is a major factor behind the trade and development program, TDP, which operates alongside A.I.D. Congress in '69 or '70 wrote the legislation creating OPIC, Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Congress has pushed State and A.I.D. to do more in the private sector abroad, and more to encourage expanded trade and investment on the part of the United States, which is good for our balance of payments, and good for our role in the world, I think. So it isn't all one way. But having said that, I do personally feel that Congress has gone overall too far in terms of micromanagement. There are those who feel they're doing it right today in the defense area as we downsize our defense, to the point where there's a question, do we have a balanced defense to meet strategic needs of the future, or should we have a defense based on “I'll vote for yours, if you vote to keep my base.” But that's, of course, a part of the democratic process, the horse trading that's gone on from the beginning of history. President Bush did speak at Princeton University, just a few months ago, and addressed this subject very forthrightly, and if I'd realized we might get into it, I would have brought along a quote which I like to use, in which he quotes one of our founding fathers who was very critical even back then of the effort of Congress to draw power into—if I remember the word correctly—its vortex. So I really think though that in the executive and the legislative branches, its turning out probably the way the founding fathers wanted it. They wanted a certain balance, they wanted a certain tension between the two branches,

they didn't want the presidency to become all-powerful. So I see this as something that is a part of our structure, which is unique. You certainly don't find it in the parliamentary system. And I had to explain this repeatedly overseas as to how our system works. I was overseas a few weeks ago, in a private sector trip, and the assignment that I was given in talking to a large business group was the role of Congress in foreign policy, and trade.

Q: It's a complicated one.

BIERMAN: It's a very complicated and ever changing, and an evolving one.

Q: I'd like to ask you about your view. While you were in Congress's staff, obviously you had to have contact with the Department of State at various levels. How well do you think you were served, and what were the problems in dealing with the State Department?

BIERMAN: My experience was a little different from a lot of others because I took a different approach. I didn't believe, and I don't believe, that the Congress and the executive necessarily have to have an adversarial relationship. So during Congressional breaks I would frequently call up H, Congressional relations in State, and say, “I've got a couple of days coming up next week, I'd like to come up to the Department and meet with people,” not at the Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary level, but the country director level; the people who write the speeches, who write the statements, prepare the briefing books, and get to know them. And it went very well. Almost universally they'd welcome my doing that, and I developed a lot of very good relationships. I developed sources of information, and it works both ways. I became a source to them as well. When I was nominated to be an ambassador to Papua New Guinea I made a call on Ron Spiers, then the Under Secretary for Management. He laughed, and said, “I'm supposed to tell you about State Department but you've been doing oversight for almost 20 years. What should we talk about?” So I said, “Why don't we talk about management styles?” So we did. We had a great conversation. But when I went out as ambassador, I had a list as long as my

arm of contacts within the Department that I could call if I needed a little help on this or that or the other, and I used those.

Q: Did you find that the State Department people you talked to understood constituent pressure, the political process? Not within Congress but I mean, what makes Congressmen tick.

BIERMAN: Well, some did, and some don't I suppose. One point I like to make, whether its domestic audience or an international one, is that a Congressman today has become an ombudsman for his constituents. The government is so big, so complicated, where do you start. The mail and the requests that come in to a Congressman have grown dramatically over the years to the point where each member of the House has one or two or more people who do nothing but handle those kinds of things. I think some members of State Department, some staffers, understand that. But they're not dealing with constituents day after day, so perhaps they're not as sensitive to it as others would be. Those of us who served on committee staff, separate from the member's personal staff, and I should make a distinction—I was on the committee staff—even we dealt with member's constituent groups, people that would come in that were for, or against, the Vietnam war; for or against our involvement in Nicaragua; for or against our involvement here or there or wherever. I tell foreigners, you can be heard on the Hill, staffers will listen to most any point of view. I've dealt with people who were emotional about this cause, or that cause, and they deserve a hearing. That's what makes our system work. In not every country can a constituent get a hearing. He may not be able to see the member directly, but certainly you can see a member of the staff who will let the member know the gist of what was said, at least I did.

Q: What about the Department of Defense? Often there are issues where the Department of Defense goes in one direction, and State goes the other. The Department of Defense can line up 30 or 40 people with charts. The military always seem to have such a nice definite answer. Even though I'm speaking as a former State Department employee,

sometimes they can be dead wrong, not always but I mean there's this positiveness, and mass of information that can be kind of overwhelming. How did you find this.

BIERMAN: Well, we dealt with them because foreign affairs, and foreign relations committees, also have jurisdiction over foreign military sales, international military training programs, the arms control agency, military assistance. My own experience was that I found the Department of Defense very responsive. One problem I had at one point some years ago was that—I won't use names—but the corresponding Under Secretaries of State and Defense who were concerned with military assistance sales and that sort of thing, didn't have a particularly close relationship. Each man had a key staffer that dealt with us were great guys. So one day I simply took them both to lunch, out of my own pocket —nobody pays for that in government you know—and we had an excellent lunch; the two men hit it off beautifully, and it simplified my life immensely because I started getting the same story from both in the future. In other words, they started working together. But wherever you are, whether its the Hill or the executive branch, personalities are always a factor. That's life.

Q: Before we leave this thing, from your point of view looking at this as a professional, could you characterize how well—you got in at the tail end of the Johnson administration, but the Johnson, and then the Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan and Bush, although you didn't...

BIERMAN: I was ambassador when Bush came in.

Q: But those administrations dealt with Congress from your perspective?

BIERMAN: Yes, I can. I think what I have to say is no lone opinion. But a large part of President Carter's problem in Washington, was that he did not have a strong Congressional relations staff. The head of it had come up from Georgia where he dealt with the state legislature. I'm going to tell you a little story which is 100% true. On the minority side of the House, I should say, that minority counsels and staff directors, such as

myself, met once a week, every Friday morning. You know, if you're in the minority, you have to try harder—kind of like Avis. One of the members who was then working for the then minority leader knew one of the staff. There was one staff member who'd come from the House, and who was very able and I can't think of his name right now, but he arranged through this fellow for the whole team to come over and meet with us on a Friday morning. I say the whole team, but there were 6 or 8 people. And right now I don't remember the name of the head of the operation—Bob Bickel who is on TV frequently, I think was the number two at the time. We have a chance to ask questions after a little presentation, and my question was as follows—of course, we work a lot with State Department on these issues, and State Department Congressional relations, but foreign policy today is broader than State Department. A lot of other agencies are involved, and on occasion we need to go to the White House to say, what is policy? because the Departments are fighting it out. I said, “Who on your staff deals with international foreign policy relations?” And this individual, the head of Congressional relations, looked around and said, “Gee, I guess we don't have anybody.” I said, “Thank you.” I cite that story as an example of the fact that they didn't have people in place, and Democratic Congressmen used to complain to me, and based on superb Democratic professionals that I knew on the Hill, I could have staffed him one. I, a Republican. He seemed to have been leery of getting too close to the Hill. I don't know. Obviously anything I say would be speculation, but I must say that starting with Nixon, he had superb people, really superb people working in Congressional relations. Gerry Ford himself having come from the Hill, continued that, and he himself wasn't adverse to asking questions. I can remember right after he went in the White House he had a reception to which a lot of Hill staff were invited, and I was relaxing and enjoying the buffet table and I noticed him quizzing a fellow from Banking and Currency. I thought, “Oh, my God,” and I mentally made a quick list of what we'd done lately, and five minutes later he was over, “Ev, what did you do on this? What have you done on that in the committee?” He followed up very closely. I must say I have a very high regard for him. I hope history rates him higher than some do now because I think he deserves it.

Reagan, again, brought in again experienced Hill professionals. A lot of them you know the names of here in town. Some are in the press right now in connection with a court nominee. But they are all people with a lot of Hill experience who have access, and they know how they work, they know the biographical background of an individual, and if you're going to approach him, we better do it this way, not that way. These are just basic things. I don't personally know the Bush Congressional relations people because I was overseas as an ambassador at the time he came into office, and I've not been on the Hill since then.

Q: I wonder then if we could talk about how you became an ambassador.

BIERMAN: Well, as a part of many Congressional delegations overseas I had visited many embassies, and I had seen embassies at work, I'd known a number of ambassadors, and I felt I would like to use this experience I had acquired on the Foreign Affairs Committee, as an ambassador. I knew I needed some political support, and I talked to Senator Lugar of Indiana whom I've known for many years, who was then chairman of Foreign Relations; with Congressman Bob Michel of Illinois who is Republican leader of the House. And they and a lot of others endorsed and supported me. I talked to the personnel people. I was endorsed by a very senior, almost Mr. Foreign Service, individual.

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...a period of time, and I was interviewed by presidential personnel. I should say I've never contributed a dime to the presidential campaign, maybe that makes me unusual as a political appointee.

Q: No, I don't think so. A good number of people don't. I mean they've been picked for other purposes.

BIERMAN: But I think there were two or three things: one, as a political appointee, I'd paid my dues. I'd worked in the trenches supporting the cause. There were some, I think, who said, “Hey, we shouldn't appoint him because we need him where he is.” Others

said, “He's paid his dues.” Other said, “Hey, he's qualified, so State Department won't balk,” and they didn't. And I'd made a lot of friends over the years, both on the Hill and in the administration, and some people thought, “Hey, he'll do a good job, and he's earned it.” So I got a call from the White House one day from Presidential Personnel saying, “Would you take an appointment?” First they talked about my going to Mauritius. It turned out State Department had a person they wanted there for that. You know, State and the White House decides these things jointly. I guess it's a trade, Smith for Jones sort of thing. And I got a call, “Would you be willing to go to Papua New Guinea?” And I said, “How long do I have to decide?” And they said, “An hour.” So I quickly called my friends at State Department, and one of my staff is a former State Department officer, and his wife was in the bureau, and I asked her about the country, and she told me about the crime situation, and some of the problems there. I talked to my Foreign Service friend, whom I might as well say who it is, Phil Habib. And Phil said, “Everett, take it. There's a lot that needs to be done there, there's a great opportunity, and while you're out there say hello to Mr. Somare,” the founder of the country. I talked to my political supporters, talked to my wife, and we decided to go, and it was a great experience. It was an absolutely fantastic experience where I used everything I've ever done in my life.

Q: You were ambassador from 1986 to '89. How were you both personally and, as the system goes, prepared to go out there?

BIERMAN: The desk at State was extremely helpful, of course, and they arranged a lot of briefings for me which helped to deal with the political, the economic, and those kinds of issues, and that's a big help. I also talked to a couple former ambassadors to the country who were back in the United States, and that was helpful. But basically my wife and I took the attitude that it was a new adventure, and that we were going to like it, and be successful at it. My view is that if you're anticipating problems, you're looking for problems, you're going to find them. You're going to find things you don't like, it's automatic, if that's the attitude you take with you. We didn't take that attitude with us, and we had a wonderful

experience, and we've just revisited there three weeks ago, and were warmly received by everyone.

Q: Before you went out there, did somebody sit down and say, “These are American interests with this new country.”

BIERMAN: Yes, of course. The desk was particularly helpful in that area, the country director, the Pacific Islands director. These people were all extremely helpful in that. The bottom line of what I was told was this: the attitude there is that we treat them with benign neglect, that we no longer care, and it's your job to change it, and you don't have any money to do it with.

Q: How about commercial interests? Were there many commercial interests with the country?

BIERMAN: There are commercial interests there, and we worked hard to expand those. You've got AMACO there in a joint venture in copper mining, you've got Chevron there in an oil exploration. They found oil, they'll start producing it in 1992. My last week I spent most of it helping Mobil get in, get over the bureaucratic hurdles.

Q: To look for oil?

BIERMAN: Phillips Petroleum is there. There's gold mining, gold has been found. There's a Canadian company, Placer involved, American manager. There's an American company, Battle Mountain Gold that's involved. It's an interesting country in that it's a rich but poor country in many respects. There are a lot of resources needing to be developed, but an awful lot of people don't have very much. A large part of the country is really not in the cash economy. They produce some of the best coffee in the world, and I'd like to help find a market for some of it. It's grown in the highlands, it's superb. It has a democratic government, a parliamentary system, which encourages investment, and you can take your profits out. But it's a country with a lot of problems too. You've got an insurrection

in Bougainville where the copper mine there, Bougainville Copper, is closed down. It's a complicated matter but some of the people there want to secede, others don't.

Q: Bougainville is part of Papua New Guinea?

BIERMAN: Yes. It's a part of what they call the North Solomons. These people are very much related to those on the Solomon Islands, but somebody somewhere drew a line, and they are a province of Papua New Guinea and they have members in parliament, and so forth. But right now things are pretty much at a standstill. There aren't many government services there. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army, they call themselves, it's a potent force. They're trying to negotiate a settlement. All these things will, I think, take time.

Q: Well, when you arrived—in the first place is it hard to get there?

BIERMAN: It was hard to get there then because you had to fly to Australia, and then back from there to Papua New Guinea. One thing that I'm proud that we were able to do in my first year was get an American airline in, and Continental Airlines flies in from its hub at Wong(?). So now you can fly from Port Moresby, the capital city, to Guam, to Hawaii.

Q: I wonder if you could describe a bit the staff there, and what it did? Where were you actually located, and how was the embassy set up?

BIERMAN: The chancery is a very decrepit building, referred to by one official of State Department as a dog. But, while I was there, we housed some very good American officers. It had a very small staff which I was able to strengthen with cooperation from the Department of State. When I arrived we did not have a political-military officer. One had been approved but there wasn't an officer. So I used my list of names and called Bill Swing, who is now ambassador in South Africa I think. Bill was in personnel then, and he found, looking at his computer, that it had been entered wrong. We had a man in Honiara, but he was attached to our embassy because he had to be attached to somebody. He was listed as a political officer so they thought we had one. We got that straightened out

and got one, he performed the role of political- military officer really at that time. We had an econ-commercial officer, State, it was a tandem couple at that time, his wife was the GSO...

Q: General Services Officer.

BIERMAN: ...General Services Officer, and also handled visas, consular affairs, that sort of thing, a joint activity. I soon found that my econ-commercial officer, an extremely able man, was often times behind on his work and I found out the reason was that, since we didn't have an A.I.D. mission there (the A.I.D. mission for the region was in Suva, a smaller location, but perhaps a nicer one to live), that we had no one working for A.I.D. and he did he did a lot of the advance—gofer type work—for them. So I notified A.I.D. that we really had to make a change in that approach because he wasn't able to get out his work. They sent out a team and looked at it, and they agreed that we definitely needed an office there. So we now have a branch office of A.I.D. in Port Moresby, with a superb officer and a small staff, which means, number one, we have a more effective A.I.D. program, and it's the biggest A.I.D. program in that region. So there should be an officer there. They are doing a lot of work in medical, maternal and child care, malaria testing, things like that, and private sector work. Also, our econ-commercial officer can now do a full-time job of encouraging investment and trade. We also have added a Defense Attach. While I was there we started, at the request of the government there, a small military relationship in which we brought in a Special Forces sergeant to train their sergeants, and how to train recruits, and that type of thing. The principal military relationship there is with their former colonial power, Australia. But they wanted to diversify their relationship, so we brought in one young man. He's about to leave, I believe, but he's done a superb job and they like him, they trust him, and he's providing training that I think is appropriate to their size of a military, which is quite small. But we now have a Defense Attach out there which we were able to add. And we added some support personnel. We had a political-economic officer at one point, and tried to fix up the old building as best we could. They're getting ready to move to another building soon. I had hoped to build a new chancery. We had approval

of it, but speaking of the role of Congress, there were some who felt that it was too much money to spend. So that project has been put aside for the present time.

Q: What was the political situation that you were dealing with? Looking at it, it looks like a huge area actually, with almost impossible communications, at least by reputation, a lot of quite primitive tribes. I'm surprised that the place works at all.

BIERMAN: Well, that's part of the fascination of the place. Part of the problems they encounter have come from going from primitive to modern in a very short period of time. I illustrate that by commenting that while I was waiting outside a grocery store for my wife one day, a young man drove up who was with one of the government agencies; one of the real comers; a college degree; a master's degree; had traveled around the world with a minister; he introduced me to his two little boys who were sitting in his car, and then he said, “Now I want you to meet auntie from the village.” In the back seat sat this little old lady chewing betel nut. There is from the primitive to the modern encompassed in one family. I saw that individual when I was back there three weeks ago, and spent an hour with him. And now in Port Moresby there are people dressed in primitive fashion, and yet you've got well educated people also. So it's a major job, and education is a big job. They've got tremendous challenges. Vocational training is a big job, and we're putting a lot of money through our aid program for vocational training.

But my wife and I—our approach as fairly outgoing, down to earth people—is to get out and get to know people. She worked hard in her area, and I did in mine, and despite all its crime its a very religious, very Christian, country, with every denomination you can think of here in the United States there; with at least 3,000 missionaries over there; mostly out in the bush—not in Port Moresby, out in the bush. And a lot of them are working on language translation. More than 100 of their 800 languages have been translated. The New Testament has been translated into those languages and literacy courses taught by these missionaries. A tremendous dedication on their part.

We traveled all over the country; we went to every function imaginable to show the American flag. Remember, the job was to show we care without spending any money, to speak of. I got up early in the morning and went on walkathons for charity. Most ambassador would send some third secretary. But all you had to do was set your clock a little early, tell the driver to pick you up, and it was a chance to walk along, show American interest, talk with the prime minister who almost always went on these, and I had some of my best conversations ever with the prime minister at that time—at 6:30 in the morning, on a walkathon.

Q: Could you explain what a walkathon is?

BIERMAN: You have runs for charity here, and it's so hot there most of the time they don't have many runs, but they have walkathons. People come out, and you get people to pledge $5.00, or 5 kina, or 10 kina for your walk, and then that money, when you collect it, goes to the charity, which was the Hospital Improvement Committee. I've served on the Hospital Improvement Committee, I've joined the Lions Club, I was on their council at St John's which runs the ambulance service—their board—all things because, number one, I'm interested in them anyway—I belong to the Lions Club at home; but number two, this is a way of showing that you care. One of the things that made me feel good once was the Foreign Minister was quoted as having cited two countries' ambassadors as really caring about the country, and an American was one.

Q: Did you have any sticky issues to deal with, say with the Foreign Minister, or the Prime Minister?

BIERMAN: Perhaps the stickiest issue that occurred which was shortly after I arrived there; their Papuanese then ambassador to the United States, a fellow named Abus Aneito, was reportedly driving while intoxicated one night in Georgetown, and had a bad accident in which a young man was severely injured. He was then recalled by their government, and that issue until it was resolved, was a sticky issue. But it was resolved

a couple years down the road with a payment. Payment is not unknown there, payment for wrongs. That was resolved, and we had to keep that on the back burner without boiling over for quite a while. There was the matter of fisheries. We signed a fisheries agreement while I was out there—a regional fisheries treaty, and that was a real god- send because before that American fishing boats had been picked up by Solomon Islands and other countries. And then the Magnuson Act was applied against them.

Q: Magnuson Act being...

BIERMAN: Well, out of the Magnuson Act applied certain penalties to countries that might have picked up an American fishing boat. But the truth is, some of them were in their waters, and they were taking natural resources without compensation. But we have, and I think our government can be real proud of the regional fisheries treaty which is a model. Papua New Guinea and others have been trying to get the Japanese to follow it, they won't do it. They'd rather do it bilaterally, but we worked out a treaty with all the Pacific island states. We signed it while I was there. Its worked very well; it's about to expire; the five years are coming up before long. So they are renegotiating it now. But that issue had been a very sticky issue. And there were two prime ministers while I was there. The first one didn't have much of an interest in foreign affairs, but then he developed it toward the latter part of his term. He was the one I used to deal with during the walkathons. In fact, he invited me once to bring in an American Army Engineering Unit to build a road. He said, “We'll call it the American Road.” I said, “No, Prime Minister, I'd like to bring one in, but why don't we have our two units work together, and build one jointly and learn from one another.” He said, “I like that.” And that's what we did. We strengthened our ties, and I think we made a large step forward in overcoming the perception that Americans no longer cared.

Q: What about places like Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, were these places pretty much on the periphery, or how did we deal with them?

BIERMAN: We have a small office in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and actually we raised it to embassy status so the officer there is the charg# when the ambassador is not there. Solomon Islands is one of those countries that had picked up a fishing boat, the Jeannette Diana, but that issue is pretty much behind us now. The Foreign Fisheries Agency, which administers this program, has an office there; is run out of Honiara. Our relationship is good. Our ships come in to port there. Next year will be the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal, and there will be a lot of attention to it. Vanuatu is a different story. I was the first ambassador to Vanuatu, relations were open, shortly after I got to Port Moresby, so they simply added Vanuatu to my charter, and the Senate approved it. The first time I went to Vanuatu there were Russian fishing boats with antennae all over the place in the port, and Lebanese in the hotel. And they put a guard outside my door all night long. Every time I'd look out there would be a policeman looking right at the door.

But I think relations with Vanuatu have warmed up considerably.

Q: Vanuatu consists of what?

BIERMAN: It used to be known as the New Hebrides in World War II. It was under what was called a French-British condominium, which is an unusual arrangement to say the least. The the prime minister is an Episcopalian priest, Anglican priest, named Father Walter Leany. He was considered at the time I went out there to be somewhat of a leftist priest, but I must say that during the time I served as ambassador—we didn't have an office there—but I or an officer would go over frequently; we developed a good relationship. The Russian fishing boats were no longer there. The Lebanese are no longer there. The American Peace Corps is in. One of the last things I did on a visit to Vanuatu was to sign a Peace Corps agreement. They wanted scientist teachers particularly at that time. I'm told the program is going very, very well, and I think our relationship today with Vanuatu is very good. I wish we had an office in Vanuatu, and I hope we do but it's a matter of money.

Q: What was your impression of how the northern half of New Guinea is being administered under the Indonesians? I mean, is there much relationship between the two?

BIERMAN: You're referring to Irian Jaya?

Q: Yes.

BIERMAN: Well, I didn't have any direct contact with Irian Jaya. The closest I came to it was when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees invited all the ambassadors and high commissioners to go with him on a trip to visit a refugee camp. Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, the governments, try very hard to manage that relationship carefully. Indonesia has opened a consulate across the border in Papua New Guinea, and Papua New Guinea has a consulate across the border in Irian Jaya. I haven't heard much about the OPM lately. Both countries are working very hard to maintain an harmonious relationship. I was out on a private trip— I mean I retired from government, and I'm in the private sector now- -I was on a trip to the Pacific just a few weeks ago including a visit to Jakarta for a week. I'm on the board of a company that does joint ventures between Indonesia and the United States and other countries. And during the course of that visit Irian Jaya was mentioned as an area where they're putting a lot of emphasis in development, a lot of money into roads, and education development, but that was all of it that I heard about it. We also visited Papua New Guinea on a personal trip and stayed with friends that we made while we were there, and revisited a lot of our friends and contacts, both in government and out, and nothing much was said about Irian Jaya, everything seems to be very quiet.

Q: Did you feel there were problems or something, that we made a certain amount of deference to the Australians by saying this is Australian's—there's always been a much closer relationship as part of their colonial role, were we in competition with the Australians. How did you find your...

BIERMAN: You know how to ask good questions, because that's a very sensitive issue. Papua New Guineans have with Australia, like most former colonies have with former colonial powers including some of our relationships, sort of a love-hate relationship. I suppose we have that with the Philippines.

Q: With the Philippines, I'm sure we do. I know we do.

BIERMAN: And also the Australian business people sort of look on Papua New Guinea as their turf. But at the same time most of the larger companies are in joint ventures together. It is a very touchy issue because it goes back to the historical colonial relationships, a lot of sensitivities involved. I tried not to get involved in how they felt about their relationships with Australia. Obviously they need Australia in many areas, and Australia is their largest aid donor. But they want very much to diversify relationships, as I mentioned earlier. And while I was there I indicated they wanted to start a military relationship, and we kept it very small. As I said, we had one sergeant training other sergeants, and training recruits. But we started by annual military talks in which we discussed our small programs, and how they could be made more effective because we don't have much money to put in there, and we're not competing with the Australians in any way. But they want their own relationship with us. I must say Americans are popular, basically popular, in Papua New Guinea.

Q: During the Owen Stanley, I mean all that long very difficult campaign, where American and Australian troops were fighting the Japanese, did the Americans leave a good impression at the time?

BIERMAN: The Americans left, apparently, a very good impression, and I quizzed them about that. I said, “You know our military units were segregated in those days,” because from my residence you could see a causeway to a small island, built, I'm told—I can't prove it—by a black American engineering battalion. And the answer was, “Yes, but they wore the same uniforms, got the same pay, and used the same equipment.” They didn't

just carry ammunition. There is a film out called “Angels of War” which I have a copy of, its a video, which is the story of that campaign in which Papua New Guinean men carried wounded, and carried ammunition. They played a major, major role.

Q: That terrible trail up and over the Owen Stanley mountains took tremendous endurance and courage for everybody who fought, including the Japanese.

BIERMAN: And most people were sick with malaria during that time. No, evidence of the war is all around you. As you land at the airport at Port Moresby, if you look out one side of your airplane, you see revetments standing to this day and where the planes were parked. There are weeds and trees growing out of them, but they're there. While I was there we found a B-17 bomber on Mt. Over__, about an hour from Port Moresby that flew into a mountain. It wasn't seen until the paint wore off a few years ago, and the sun began to reflect off of the aluminum. There are planes all over there. I think I can maybe illustrate it well also, not only the war, but by the missionaries. One day four men came in to see me that I didn't know. They all worked in middle level jobs for different companies, Shell Oil and different places. They said, “We came to see you because we were all educated in mission schools, and the missionaries that educated us have all retired and gone back to New Jersey,” that particular group was from New Jersey, “and if you don't mind, Ambassador, we'd like to start a PNG-U.S. Friendship Society.” I said, “God bless you. Wonderful. What can I do to help?” And we formed one before I left. But you know, they said, “We miss our contact with these people, and we'd just like to have more contact with the Americans.” And in that embassy which was supposed to have been built there was a separate meeting room for USIS where groups like that could have met. That's fairly typical. Americans, with all our problems of race relations, and so forth, most Americans are not seen as racist over there. Now they size you up quickly; they're very, very sensitive. They can sense very quickly if you act, or feel, or think you're superior. They can sense that in a minute. But if you're just yourself, and fairly down to earth and friendly, you make tremendous friendships. The church we attended, the women's groups that my wife participated in, had a potluck supper for us three weeks ago, just to welcome

us back. In my opinion, a lot depends on the individual, and the personal relationships you develop.

Q: Going back to dealing with the government, did you find on this Australian-American thing that there were any issues that you had to sort of dance around? How did you get along with the Australian representative?

BIERMAN: I got along fine with the Australian representative. I did my job as I saw it, and he did his. I figured I was hired in part to help encourage U.S. trade and investment, and I figured he was hired to do the same. And he knew I was active, and I knew he was. Actually the high commissioner during part of the time I was there is now their number two in Washington. But there were three different ones during the period that I served, one finishing his tour, the one who is here now had a relatively short tour there, and then another one came in shortly before I left. They have a difficult job, of course, as representing the former colonial power. I did my job, and no, we didn't ask the Australians "do you mind if we do this, or do that?" They knew what we were doing basically, and we knew what they were doing, and we had good communication with them.

Q: How about UN votes? Was this ever a problem? I mean, every ambassador gets a shopping list of UN votes, and sometimes these are just "get support from Israel," and if you're in Iraq you're supposed to get support for Israel. Did you have many problems with UN votes?

BIERMAN: Not serious problems. They voted our way on a lot of issues. I didn't have to go in and twist any arms really sharply. There may be a vote coming up pretty soon for the president of the General Assembly, Mr. Somare, Michael Somare, the founder of the country, the first prime minister and now foreign minister, is a leading candidate for president of the General Assembly. And Wong(?), who entered the race fairly recently, was a representative from Saudi Arabia. Now the United States will have an interesting vote.

Q: This is a good time to head for the hills. Is there any situations there, or problems, you think I may have missed?

BIERMAN: One area that I haven't touched on is that Papua New Guinea is very, very interested in expanding their exports, and expanding investment in Papua New Guinea. Investment which is largely—I shouldn't say largely—but investment which is discouraged on the part of some people because of the crime situation.

Q: What is the crime situation there?

BIERMAN: This is a case of people who rob, steal, rape, breaking and entering, that sort of thing. We have it in a lot of our larger cities too, including certain parts of Washington, DC There was a curfew on while I was there, from 9:00 to 5:00 in the morning. It is a serious problem, but the point I want to make is that you have to look at that in perspective of the total picture. Countries all over the world have crime problems, including so- called western societies. But you've got a country with tremendous resources; a country as large or larger than New Zealand; a country with a democratic government where every change of government has to follow parliamentary and legal constitutional procedures; with a supreme court headed by justices that I know personally and admire and respect. A government that encourages the private sector, and an opposition that encourages the private sector, and says the government doesn't do enough, and each has said that about the other. Where do you find the kind of resources they've got? Where do you find a country that has all those things, which doesn't have some problems? So my answer to those who consider investment is, do it with your eyes open, recognize you've got some problems, but that you're going to have problems anywhere you go. Here you have resources, you've got a government that's friendly to the private sector, and so its worth taking a look at.

My wife and I have made a lot of good friends there. We dealt with a lot of issues while I represented the United States. We had difficult issues, but the fact that we had good personal relationships was a tremendous asset in terms of resolving issues.

Q: I want to thank you very much. I think this has been the first interview I've done with anybody from that area, and it's very illuminating. I thank you.

BIERMAN: There's one little story I should have told to you. I had the occasion to meet a member of parliament, who at that time was chairman of the foreign affairs in the defense committee. And when he found out my background that I was not a career officer, but rather had come from the legislative branch with a foreign affairs background. He said, “May I take you to lunch tomorrow? I need your advice on what I ought to be doing as chairman of the joint foreign affairs and defense committee.” He's now the Minister of Defense. So it was interesting. There was another occasion which put me on a high one day. A minister whom I had never met before, reached out and shook my hand and said, “Congratulations.” And I said, “Thank you, on what?” He said, “On an American embassy that gives a damn.” I said, “Thank you.”

Q: I want to thank you.

End of interview